

Delta Overview and Issues

September 2007

Department of Water Resources

The Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta is vitally important to California's water supply, environment and economy. It is the hub of water distribution in the state, supplying drinking water to two-thirds of the state's population and irrigation water to millions of acres of productive farmland.

The Delta is a unique environmental resource that is home to over 750 plant and animal species. Its levees protect over 500,000 acres of low-lying farmland and contain 700 miles of channels that offer recreational opportunities to the nearby cities of the bay area and the central valley. The Delta also contains critical infrastructure including state highways, railroads, pipelines carrying water supplies and petroleum products, natural gas well fields, and gas storage facilities.

All of these functions are jeopardized by a host of factors that threaten Delta sustainability:

- **Decline of native species** affects other uses of the Delta, and has recently caused voluntary and court-mandated curtailments of Delta water exports that will result in reductions in Delta water exports by 10 to 33 percent.
- **Subsidence** of Delta islands places increasing strain on levees.
- **Earthquakes** could damage or destroy dozens of levees simultaneously, surpassing current capability to repair and reclaim flooded islands.
- **Invasive species** alter the Delta food web, competing with or preying upon native species.
- **Climate change** will increase peak river flows and overwhelm Delta levees, while **rising sea level** could alter salinities.
- **Toxics** may place additional pressures on Delta species through reduction in available prey species or direct mortality of species of concern.

- **Land use changes** interrupt breeding or feeding patterns of native species by altering the habitat available for direct use or nutrient inputs to Delta waters.
- **Water diversions** ranging from small riparian siphons to the state and federal water projects alter the timing, magnitude, and even the direction of flows in Delta channels, and can cause direct or indirect mortality of Delta species.



Delta Levee Break

Numerous efforts are underway now to develop a plan for the Delta's future or to protect and restore the region.

The Governor's **Delta Vision Task Force** will identify a vision and strategy for managing the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta as a sustainable ecosystem that will continue to support environmental and economic functions that are critical to the people of California. The Task Force will prepare an independent public report that will be submitted to the Governor that sets forth its findings and recommendations on the sustainable management of the Delta by late 2007 and a Strategic Plan to implement the Delta Vision in 2008.



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The **Bay-Delta Conservation Plan** or BDCP is intended to provide for the conservation and management of covered species within the planning area while proceeding with projects that restore and protect water supply and water quality. A plan is expected in 2008, with environmental documentation to take about two years after that.

The **Delta Risk Management Strategy** (or DRMS) is assessing major risks to Delta resources from floods, seepage, subsidence, and earthquakes. DRMS will also evaluate the consequences, and develop recommendations to manage the risk.

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The problems of the Delta are too critical to ignore, and a Delta solution is too important to postpone. That is why substantial funding for Delta improvements is proposed in the Governor's comprehensive water plan. The funding for a solution must be ready as decisions on the Delta's future are made.

